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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NOMINATION OF AMBASSADOR MOUSHIRA KHATTAB FOR THE  
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARD

REF: STATE 126072

¶1. Ambassador Moushira Khattab, Embassy Cairo's nominee for the Secretary's International Woman of Courage award, deserves USG commendation for having formed and led a broad alliance to combat female genital mutilation (FGM) in Egypt. Since the beginning of her tenure as Secretary General of the National Council on Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in 1999, Ambassador Khattab has pursued an agenda of progressive reform in Egyptian family law. Recently Ambassador Khattab recruited religious leaders and other important stakeholders to address the highly charged and sensitive issue of FGM. Thanks to Ambassador Khattab, both the Egyptian government and society have begun to take concrete and specific steps to eradicate a practice that has long inflicted pain and suffering on the great majority of Egyptian women.

¶2. FGM is a long-standing custom in Egypt. Government statistics indicate that 97 percent of ever married women aged 15 to 49 -- Christians and Muslims alike -- have undergone FGM. Practitioners frequently conduct the operation without anesthetic, using knives or razors. The procedure can lead to death through shock from pain or bleeding. Failure to use sterile instruments may lead to infections. Egypt has the highest rate of Hepatitis C in the world; many girls are infected as a result of FGM procedures. Other complications include urinary and reproductive infections, scarring that causes difficulty during childbirth, and infertility, and a host of other urinary and reproductive tract problems. Experts estimate that 70 percent of female infertility rates in Egypt are the result of FGM complications. FGM, rooted in obscure traditional practice, harms Egyptian women both physically and mentally.

¶3. Ambassador Khattab has worked with vigor and passion to combat FGM. She is one of Egypt's most outspoken and inspirational leaders lobbying for the rights of women and children. In her role as the head of the NCCM, she has considerable influence with policy makers and commands admiration and respect from grassroots women activists for her leadership, commitment, vision, and courage. Working closely with First Lady Suzanne Mubarak, she has enlisted the assistance of the Minister of Health to lead a nationwide effort to eradicate FGM. The NCCM, working with the MOH, has also enlisted top Egyptian religious leaders, including the Coptic Orthodox Pope, the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, and the Grand Mufti, to launch an ambitious public awareness campaign, to spread the message to the Egyptian people that there is no basis for FGM in Christianity or Islam.

¶4. Ambassador Khattab has also led the effort to bring the NCCM message to rural Egypt. Under her leadership, NCCM trainers go to villages throughout the country. Working at the community level, volunteers educate citizens on the medical risks and lack of religious basis for FGM. After extensive community dialogue, NCCM volunteers obtain pledges

from village mothers and fathers that they will not subject their daughters to FGM.

15. The impact in Egypt has been extraordinary. The Ministry of Health (MOH) has banned FGM, once an endemic human rights problem, and prohibited medical personnel and clinics from any involvement in the procedure. MOH inspectors, for the first time, are closing clinics involved in the banned practice. Parliament is expected to consider a new law making FGM illegal when it reconvenes late in 2007. Thanks to Ambassador Khattab's leadership, the media has also focused on the violence of FGM procedures, with ordinary citizens re-examining and rejecting the practice. As the New York Times noted in a recent story, Ambassador Khattab and the NCCM are leaders of "one of the most powerful social movements in Egypt in decades, uniting an unlikely alliance of government forces, official religious leaders and street-level activists," in an effort to transform Egyptian society and improve the lives of girls and women.

16. Notwithstanding the clear benefits of Ambassador Khattab's campaign, there are still some reactionary voices in Egypt who oppose it. These voices charge the anti-FGM movement of being a tool of the West and of disrespecting ancient customs. Ambassador Khattab's courageous response has been to confront these critics with facts and move forward with increased passion and determination. In addition to fighting FGM, the NCCM focuses on several other important issues that face women in Egypt such as greater access to education for girls. Ambassador Khattab is the primary author of a national plan of action to improve girls' education, and NCCM works closely with NGO's to ensure that successive generations of Egyptian women receive the skill sets they need for a flourishing future. Finally, she is leading a fight against child labor and protecting the rights

of often neglected street children.

17. With her campaign against FGM well-launched, Ambassador Khattab--who also represents Egypt on the UN Committee for the Protection of the Child--has now embarked on a new campaign to improve Egypt's legal protections for children. The NCCM has authored new legislation to protect children against trafficking, prostitution, and other exploitation. The Egyptian parliament is expected to consider the new child protection law late in 2007. Its passage will mark another major advance for the expansion of human rights in Egypt.

18. With admiration and respect for Ambassador Khattab's tireless leadership in the fight against FGM in Egypt and for her efforts to protecting children, in Egypt and around the world, Embassy Cairo is pleased to nominate Ambassador Moushira Khattab as a Woman of Courage.

19. Biodata for Ambassador Khattab, per para 12 of reftel:

Full legal name: Moushira Khattab

Job title/association: Secretary General/National Council for Childhood and Motherhood

DOB: N/A (o/a 1950)

Country of Birth: Egypt

Citizenship: Egypt

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Telephone number: 20-2524-0277

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Passport number: N/A

Per reftel instructions, Ambassador Khattab has confirmed that she is honored to be nominated for this award.

